

February 2, 2012

Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. Congressman Sam Johnson
Chairman Subcommittee on Social Security

Re: Social Security Administration's Death Master File

The La Porte County Indiana Genealogical Society shares the objective of protecting Americans against fraud and of addressing deficiencies in the current operation of the Death Master File. We hope that measures can be developed which address these concerns while preserving to the maximum extent practicable access for genealogical and other legitimate purposes. We urge legislators who work to address these concerns to target the criminal behavior rather than seeking a quick solution whose only real impact is felt by law-abiding citizens, law-abiding citizens who use the index for the myriad of legitimate purposes for which it was created.

Members of our society, the La Porte County Indiana Genealogical Society, have expressed this concern. Through the availability of SSDI, one of our members was led to an uncle he had only met once in person. The uncle was the oldest brother of our member's father who left for California in the 1930's. Only through SSDI, accessed on "Family Search", was the member able to find where and when his uncle died.

Another member, whose father's siblings were tragically separated while they were young children, was able, upon her father's death, to find and communicate the news to numerous cousins whom she had never met. She found several of her deceased aunts and uncles in the SSDI that pointed her in the right direction to find their families.

A third member was searching for her mother's cousin who had not been heard from in many years. For her, a search on the SSDI showed he had passed away and when and where. With this information she was able to contact a newspaper in the area and obtain an obituary to determine the details and any living survivors.

These are priceless experiences, only available through the free and open access to this public information.

The interests of our society and the genealogical community are not hard to understand. Access to records or the lack thereof, is the pivotal issue for us. Without documentation, our family histories are more legend than history. Our society's goals, to collect, preserve and disseminate knowledge and information with reference to genealogy and history, can only be achieved through unfettered access to public records.

We urge that your committee propose ways to target the criminal and not those who serve the legitimate good of the community.

Respectfully submitted,

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